

Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Digital talking-book Internet service delivers one millionth download to Kentucky reader

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Contact Information: Paige Sexton, 502-564-8300
Paige.sexton@ky.gov

FRANKFORT, Ky. – When Kentucky Talking Book Library patron Tonia Gatton downloaded the digital talking-book version of “*Charlotte’s Web*” to her home computer, she knew she was going to read a classic of children’s literature. What she didn’t know was that she was also making history. That talking book marked the one millionth piece of reading material delivered by the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service, a new initiative from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), Library of Congress.

Gatton is a rehabilitation teacher at the Kentucky Office for the Blind. “Finally having instant access to thousands of books and magazines that I can download and read as desired, rather than waiting and hoping for new books to come in the mail, has been an incredible experience,” said Gatton. “I’ve recently started going back and reading a lot of the classics that I either hadn’t read or didn’t appreciate as a child, such as “*Charlotte’s Web*.” After only a little over a year of using BARD, I can’t imagine what I did without it.”

Formally launched on April 30, 2009, BARD quickly became popular. Today more than 15,000 of NLS’s more than 800,000 patrons are registered for access. Gatton is one of approximately 300 NLS patrons who have registered for BARD through the Kentucky Talking Book Library. Registered patrons utilize new digital players introduced in the fall of 2009 to replace cassettes.

“We’re gratified by the passionate response BARD has received,” said NLS Director Frank Kurt Cylke. “At NLS, we strive to continually improve our patrons’ opportunities to access a wide range of reading material. BARD has been an unequaled success in speeding delivery to our patrons.”

Gatton selected “*Charlotte’s Web*” from among more than 18,000 titles currently available through the Internet. In the past, patrons had to wait for E.B. White’s children’s classic to arrive in the mail. BARD allowed Gatton to download a digital version for immediate playback.

The next stage in BARD’s development is to transfer administrative control from NLS to state and local libraries serving blind and physically disabled readers. The Kentucky Talking Book Library, from which Gatton receives services, assumed responsibility for administering BARD to its patrons in March, the fifth state to do so.

“Our patrons are enthusiastic about BARD,” said Barbara Penegor, branch manager of the Kentucky Talking Book Library. “Some of the more computer literate readers have switched exclusively to downloading since the option became available. We are ready to become more directly involved in the service and excited to learn that this milestone occurred so close to our assuming full responsibility for the download activity.”

NLS administers the free library program that loans materials to residents of the United States and citizens living abroad who are unable to read or use standard print materials because of visual or physical disabilities. Materials loaned include Braille and recorded books and magazines, music scores in Braille and large print, and specifically designed playback equipment.

For more information on NLS and the Talking Book service offered by the Kentucky Talking Book library visit www.kdla.ky.gov or call 502-564-8300, ext. 282.